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ABSTRACT

This annual report describes the activities of the National Association of Child Advocates (NACA) from July 2000 to June 2001. The report discusses the association's two overarching priorities for the year: implementing its internal reorganization and building financial support for child advocacy. Also described are NACA's new initiatives (such as Essential Elements, a project to determine the qualities that contribute to the effectiveness of child advocacy organizations so that NACA can improve its training and technical assistance efforts), enhanced services to members (such as an electronic mailing and member-to-member mentoring), and core services to members (such as site visits and the "A Great Idea!" series). The report concludes with a discussion of plans for the coming year, the focus of which will be the professionalization of child advocacy. (EV)

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National Association of Child Advocates 2000-2001 Annual Report from the President

by

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National Association of Child Advocates

2000-2001 Annual Report from the President

NACA's mission: to improve the lives of children in the United States by enhancing the capacity of its member organizations to effectively advocate on behalf of children and their families. ☆ NACA's fundamental belief: all children have the right to be economically secure and free from poverty and its debilitating effects; to have quality health care; to have quality educational opportunities throughout their childhood; to be safe from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence; and to live in a nurturing family, in a supportive community committed to children's development and to their maximum potential. ☆ In order to fulfill its mission, NACA provides training, technical assistance, and networking opportunities to its members[1]. Over this past year, NACA strengthened, enhanced, and re-focused efforts to more effectively support its member organizations in all three areas.

2000–2001: Two Overarching Priorities

NACA focused on two overarching priorities this past year (July 2000 – June 2001): implementing its internal reorganization and building financial support for child advocacy.

In an effort to better balance services to members regarding the issues affecting children and services to members to build stronger and more effective organizations, NACA reorganized into three teams: Policy and Advocacy, Resource and Organizational Development and Finance and Administration. All issue work rested with Policy and Advocacy, but the thrust shifted from pure issue information to a more focused look at what advocacy strategies work to move certain agendas. The establishment of the Resource and Organizational Development team underscored NACA's growing commitment to building strong member organizations. Lastly, Finance and Administration's role was to ensure the smooth operation of NACA's internal functions.

The ongoing need to prove the impact of child advocacy efforts in order to secure financial support and the need for such support in order to be effective continue to plague the NACA community. To address this reality, NACA concentrated on three initiatives. The *Child Advocates Making a Difference* series was re-instituted to reinforce the accomplishments of NACA members to the foundation community. The publication's distribution list expanded this year to ensure that more people in the foundation community were exposed to the work of NACA members. Another project, aimed at increasing the name recognition of NACA and its members and knowledge of their impact, is the Prudential Foundation-funded Project Visibility. This is expected to be an annual effort to showcase the knowledge of NACA member executive directors of the issues affecting children in their jurisdictions and their plans for addressing these problems. Finally, NACA also worked to secure pass-through grants for members with success in the gun policy arena from the Joyce Foundation.

[1] NACA's members are all 501(c)(3), independent, professionally-led, multi-issue, child advocacy organizations. In 2000-2001, NACA had 64 members in 43 states with 10 city- or county-based members.

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NACA's New Initiatives

NACA developed a number of new relationships and projects - all of which will either directly or indirectly impact the effectiveness of NACA member organizations across the country.

☆ **Essential Elements** — Perhaps the most exciting event of the past year was the initiation of the Essential Elements project, which will enable NACA to determine the qualities that contribute to the effectiveness of child advocacy organizations. Once determined, these elements will become the core of the training and technical assistance NACA provides member organizations. The findings will undergird NACA's work for years to come. The David and Lucile Packard Foundation made this project possible as part of Project Excel – an effort aimed at building the capacity of child advocacy organizations.

☆ **The Child Safe Initiative** — This exciting and timely project was developed over the past year to enable NACA and its members to use the lessons of public health to reduce the number of children who are killed or injured by guns in the United States. The Joyce Foundation is funding this new initiative, which will provide important advocacy tools on gun policy for all NACA members, especially those thrust into the gun policy arena by crises such as school shootings.

☆ **Project Visibility** — NACA developed this initiative to educate the general public about the issues affecting children from the perspective of child advocacy leaders from across the country and to raise the visibility of NACA and its nationwide network. The Prudential Foundation funding of this project has enabled NACA to secure the services of the National Institute on Children, Youth and Families to conduct the research required and of the public relations agency Golin/Harris to ensure that the desired visibility is achieved. The findings will be released in the winter of 2001–2002.

☆ **Child Advocacy Primer** — Child advocates enter the profession from all walks of life — as attorneys, social workers, child care administrators, teachers, public servants, and community members. Because there is no formal training for these individuals and because there is a need for a simple, easy-to-read, comprehensive, educational resource, NACA produced the first edition of its *Child Advocacy Primer: Tips and Tools for Improving Your Child Advocacy Skills.* This publication, which was developed as a direct result of member requests, is a compilation and overview of child advocacy strategies that have proven to be successful in securing positive changes for children. This first version is considered a work in progress and will be initially updated on an annual basis to include new information and materials that are shared with NACA.

☆ **Strategic Framework** — With guidance from NACA's Board and membership, NACA developed and implemented a new strategic framework to help NACA better serve the needs of its membership. This new framework, the result of an internal and external audit of NACA's services, highlights the unique nature of the organization and places a greater concentration on strategic advocacy and organizational management. In response to the new framework, NACA restructured into three teams: Policy and Advocacy headed by Debbie Stein; Finance and Administration headed by Sharon Stokes; and Resource and Organizational Development headed by Sally Cole.

NACA's Enhanced Services to Members

☆ **Electronic Bi-weekly Member Mailing** — This digest of current research, proposed federal legislation, best practices from across the country, and communications, organizational development and funding technical assistance continues to be a highly valued NACA member benefit. That is particularly the case with the addition of an electronic version of the *Member Mailing.* Now, information — which has been succinctly summarized by NACA staff in newsletter form — is accessible electronically, allowing the more than 500 child advocates working for member organizations to quickly find the information for which they are looking.

☆ **NACAExec Listserve** — In an effort to provide member executive directors with a discussion forum in which to share ideas, brainstorm, and seek peer-to-peer advice, NACA created the NACAExec listserve. It has proven to be a valuable tool for child advocacy leaders as it provides them with a simple, easy format for information sharing.

☆ **Member-to-Member Mentoring** — This program of matching new members with veteran executive directors has been an innovative way to introduce new members to the services and network offered by NACA. Of the eight new executive directors this year, seven have been matched with mentors.

Core Services to NACA Members

This year, NACA also reaffirmed and strengthened its core services:

☆ **On-Demand Technical Assistance** — NACA staff continued the signature service of rapid response to member inquiries. NACA's staff responded to hundreds of requests for technical assistance, advice, and guidance.

☆ **Site Visits and Presentations** — NACA staff visited members across the country to provide on-site assistance, while also gaining a better understanding of how NACA can assist its members. NACA leadership spoke at ten functions in nine states about the need for people to get involved in child advocacy.

☆ **A Great Idea! Series** — Initiated in 1998 with support from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the monthly *A Great Idea!* series describes NACA members' effective approaches to fundraising, organizational development, use of technology, community mobilization, electoral advocacy, and communications. Each monthly issue – which can be quickly read – provides an overview of a successful effort and easy step-by-step instructions on how to replicate it. Many members have advised NACA staff that this valuable resource has triggered ideas for them or helped them to refine approaches that they have used successfully.

☆ **Child Advocates Making A Difference** — Thanks to funding from The Prudential Foundation and The Annie E. Casey Foundation, NACA has brought back this series targeted toward foundations, but also now distributed to member organizations. In an age when outcomes and the bottom line are increasingly valued, the *Child Advocates Making A Difference* series shows foundations the impact of NACA members' work. NACA's second objective of showcasing the work of members is so other member organizations can possibly replicate the effort.

NACA Assists Members' Advocacy Work: A New Jersey Example

Following attendance at a NACA conference and review of NACA-produced materials, the Association for Children of New Jersey moved forward to secure legislation to extend Medicaid coverage to New Jersey's 18 – 21 year olds who were in foster care. The Association for Children of New Jersey credits NACA with being the impetus for a legislative change in its state that will benefit hundreds of youth.

☆ **2001 Member Legislative Reference Guide** — In addition to listing the legislative work planned for 2001 by NACA members, the *Guide* also identified national and regional trends. Just as importantly, it enabled members to connect with other members working on similar issues and to garner ideas on effective approaches to address the issues. The *Guide* was distributed to member organizations, foundations and the media.

☆ **Forum of Chief Executives** — This past year the Forum, historically the core service to member organizations, was held in Washington, DC from June 7 - 9, 2000, enabling NACA to take advantage of the many resources available in the Nation's capital. The Forum provided a wide array of professional development opportunities, including presentations from leading researchers in the child advocacy field, pollsters, and organizational development specialists. Additionally, a new session, entitled "Showcase of Promising Practices" was developed to help members share their effective efforts. The Forum continues to be *the* most valued NACA service today as it consistently features a mixture of plenary sessions and workshops that allow NACA executive directors to identify colleagues with particular areas of expertise, to engage in valuable dialogue with leaders in children's policy, and to re-energize for the coming year. It was this annual gathering of the executive directors of child advocacy organizations that led to the founding of the National Association of Child Advocates.

☆ **Child Advocacy Leadership Institute** — NACA served as host of the 2nd Annual Child Advocacy Leadership Institute in Washington, DC this year. As mentioned previously, child advocates enter the

profession from a variety of backgrounds — their only commonality being their desire to speak out for the voiceless. NACA created the Leadership Institute in 1999. While the Leadership Institute is still in its infancy, it promises to become a pivotal event for future child advocacy leaders.

The Future

Much of what has been described will continue into 2001-2002, but for the coming year, the focus will revolve around professionalizing child advocacy. Certainly no one can doubt the professionalism of the leaders and staff of NACA member organizations, but nonetheless there continues to be no academic recognition of child advocacy. Some would argue that it is both a positive and a negative that anyone who cares about children can, and does, call himself a child advocate. NACA's commitment is to better define the profession of child advocacy.

To that end, NACA will continue and escalate its efforts toward keeping the membership apprised of pertinent research findings and encouraging the promotion of policies and programs grounded in research. The Essential Elements initiative will reach a new level in the 2001-2002 year with the elements having been identified and a process put in place to observe, reflect and act on each member's status relative to these elements. The *Child Advocacy Primer* will be revised and, along with the Essential Elements, will form the core of a child advocacy curriculum. And, the Child Advocacy Leadership Institute, in its third year, will hopefully be as anticipated for its value by the staff of NACA member organizations as the Forum of Chief Executives is by the leaders of NACA member organizations.

The staff of the National Association of Child Advocates is fully committed to working with members to enable them to be the most effective vehicles for addressing the needs of children and families in the United States. NACA will continue to accomplish this through training, technical assistance and by providing networking opportunities.

Tamara Lucas Copeland, President
National Association of Child Advocates
June 2001

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